

ARTFORUM

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SAN FRANCISCO

"Nacht und Träume"

ALTMAN SIEGEL

Liam Everett, *Untitled (Limnos)*, 2015, acrylic, enamel, alcohol, and salt on oil-primed linen, 77 x 60". From "Nacht und Träume."



The way in which creative expression is achieved in an era of often extreme ironic self-positioning was an implicit subtext of this summer group show, albeit one uncertainly realized. Zarouhie Abdalian's *a caveat, a decoy*, 2014, a site-specific installation whose sound track looped Schubert's "Nacht und Träume"—a lied celebrating the (irrational) unconscious and mourning the loss of dreams that comes with waking—lent the exhibition its title and set its tone. Significantly, *a caveat's* sound element was forced to compete with the cacophonous street noise blaring through one (pointedly) open window in the fourth-floor gallery. Anchored by a plastic owl perched on the open window's sill, Abdalian's bare-bones work mustered its affect chiefly via its orchestration of this inside/outside aural blur. The ingenuous, inward-looking Romanticism of the Schubert lied contrasted not only with the harsh soundscape of the external world but with the caveat suggested by the "knowing" owl decoy, and hinted at the exhibition's theme of un(self)conscious expression in tension with ironic self-consciousness.

Paintings by the three other artists included in the show grappled with issues of gesture and representation while demonstrating the limitations of ironic modes. The loose but not-quite-convincingly freewheeling paintings of Johnny Bicos and Laeh Glenn undercut

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these artists' efforts at expression, at the same time generating questions about the challenges of undertaking representation itself. Two of Glenn's small oil paintings, both dated 2015, feature sets of simply outlined marks representing eyes, nose, and hands (and, in one case, a mouth), floating on vague, nonrepresentational fields—black-on-white in one work, white-on-black in the other. The works, titled with emoji-like glyphs ('v` #1 and 'v` #2, respectively) that echo the facial-feature-like marks, veer toward the coy, and almost cute. Glenn's third piece, *Night Birds*, 2015, is similarly provisional in appearance, if less brushy, portraying indistinct avian forms on tree branches. (The echo with the owl in Abdalian's piece was a nice coincidence.) Bicos's rudimentary figures in oil on linen—*Untitled (Duck Soup)*, *Untitled (Egg Salad)*, and *Untitled* (all 2015)—half merged with their hazy patchwork backgrounds, giving the works an air of being still in-process, not yet fully committed to their respective assertions.

In contrast, Liam Everett's two large-scale paintings—*Untitled (Limnos)* and *Untitled (Lakshmipur)*, both 2015—are extraordinarily worked. These abstract pieces are both rich and restless, yet the compositions and materials are cohesive. Everett uses acrylic and enamel, along with solvent agents such as alcohol and salt, to create a variety of effects on oil-primed linen. The signs of taking away—sanding, scraping, and rubbing, sometimes to the point of puncturing the canvas—are as significant as the marks themselves, the techniques together yielding a surprisingly well-integrated sense of pentimento. Everett's work has developed significantly over recent years, and even while here defaulting to more conventionally stretched wall-hung canvases—as opposed to his earlier experiments with free-flowing fabrics and extended paintings draped over frames and racks—it feels accomplished, thoughtful, and continuously inventive. Beyond the lush seduction and busy dynamism of his visual presentations, which further suggest a strong investment of both psychic and intellectual energy in their laboredness, these pieces integrate self-awareness and an uninhibited bravura of physically embodied, if at times tortured, jouissance. If the idealized "dreams" of the show's title might be applied as gloss to any creative process or product, it is in this pair of probing paintings that the often-fraught interplay between the studied and the uninhibited is most fully realized.

—Brian Karl